ACADEMICAL LEARNING IN THE DISSENTERS’ PRIVATE ACADEMIES, 1660-1720

Abstract
Previous assessments of the early academies of Protestant dissenters in England and Wales (1660-1720) have celebrated their tutors’ achievements in defying the Act of Uniformity and the Test Acts, and have argued that they pioneered a modern curriculum. Despite these views, there has been little scholarly investigation into the academies. This thesis evaluates the available sources for the first time, examining the political, philosophical, and theological controversies in which the academies were involved, as well as examining the lives and careers of their tutors and students in greater detail than has hitherto been possible. The introduction explores the reception of the academies from the late seventeenth century until the present day, exposing the paucity of evidence and the abundance of polemic which have characterised previous accounts. Chapter 1 provides a detailed examination of academies operated by nonconformists prior to the Toleration Act, reassessing the contribution of ejected university tutors, surveying attempted prosecutions, and highlighting political controversies. The second chapter extends the narrative to academies run by Protestant dissenters from the Toleration Act (1689) to the repeal of the Schism Act (1719); it contains the first-ever detailed analysis of the minutes of the London-based denominational Fund Boards, and a survey of the careers of former academy students. Chapter 3 re-evaluates the teaching of philosophy in the dissenters’ earliest academies, using newly-identified manuscript works by tutors and students to explore the study of logic, natural philosophy, and ethics. Chapter 4 uses a combination of printed and manuscript sources to examine the teaching of religious subjects at the academies, including preaching, religious history, Jewish antiquities, pneumatology, and theology; it concludes with a survey of the contribution of dissenting tutors and students to debates in the 1710s concerning subscription to an agreed form of words on the Trinity.